

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

9th/10th November 1980

The 21st annual autumn census of Greylag Anser anser and Pink-footed Geese A. brachyrhynchus was held over the weekend of 9th/10th November 1980. Following above average breeding seasons both species have increased, with Greylag up by 9000 to 90,000, and Pinkfeet up by 15,000 to 95,000. The increase in the numbers of the Pinkfeet is surprisingly large and may reflect undercounting in 1979.

The numbers of geese found roosting in each region and district of Scotland, and each county of England, are set out in the table below, together with the figures for November 1978 and 1979. The individual totals are rounded to the nearest 10, while the national totals are rounded to the nearest 1000. Where identifiable, feral or indigenous flocks of Greylags are omitted.

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	5 Nov 1978	11 Nov 1979	10 Nov 1980	5 Nov 1978	11 Nov 1979	10 Nov 1980
Orkney	-	40	310	-	-	-
Highland						
Caithness	7440	3250	4090	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	20	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	14180	13230	15380	240	-	-
Inverness	1140	2080	4170	20	-	-
Nairn	120	480	110	-	-	-
Badenoch & Strathspey	-	650	970	-	-	-
Grampian						
Moray	1540	1370	760	-	-	-
Banff & Buchan	7000	5000	4000	6200	1400	2200
Gordon	1150	2620	5670	7800	5850	4350
Kincardine & Deeside	3500	4000	2500	-	-	-
Tayside						
Angus	7680	7950	8400	6530	8000	7320
Perth & Kinross	19940	24230	23070	20370	11710	33010
Central						
Stirling	280	1140	1300	820	3000	2430
Fife	250	20	700	5000	5500	4000
Strathclyde						
Argyll & Bute	670	1420	1000	-	-	-
Cunningham	500	-	250	-	-	-
Renfrew	-	270	-	-	-	-
Dumbarton	3000	2000	2000	-	-	50
Strathkelvin	20	20	10	-	-	-
Lanark	-	-	520	2520	1600	830
Kyle & Carrick	270	310	400	-	-	-
Lothian						
West Lothian	20	-	-	-	-	-
Midlothian	650	580	730	9600	8500	5350
East Lothian	90	80	30	5200	3200	11930
Borders						
Tweeddale	30	-	-	7000	10420	7230
Berwickshire	1200	1280	1600	400	3220	3670
Roxburgh	2900	3400	6690	-	20	-

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	5 Nov 1978	11 Nov 1979	10 Nov 1980	5 Nov 1978	11 Nov 1979	10 Nov 1980
Dumfries & Galloway						
Wigtown	1040	830	1400	-	-	-
Stewartry	410	600	910	-	-	-
Nithsdale	60	90	70	700	130	3380
Annandale & Eskdale	-	-	-	-	-	-
Northumberland	1430	3100	1430	-	-	20
Cumbria	-	920	1600	10	30	70
Lancashire	-	-	-	5280	16610	9200
Humberside	-	-	-	400	400	320
Lincolnshire & Norfolk	-	-	-	10	800	50
BRITISH TOTAL	76000	81000	90000	78000	80000	95000

Weather and general conditions

The weather over the census weekend was probably the best experienced for some years. A light northerly airstream covered most of the country, bringing some cloud and a few very scattered showers, and visibility was reported as good everywhere. In these conditions finding geese is easier and counting more accurate than in poor weather.

For the second year running, rain and high winds during the autumn had produced a considerable spill of barley, and also delayed the harvest. There appeared to be ample food on the stubbles at the time of the census, though the dry spell experienced in the first fortnight of November was hastening the ploughing at least in eastern Scotland.

GREYLAGS

The population now stands at a record total, having increased by just over 10% on the previous year. The percentage of young birds in the flocks, measured by a sample of over 3000 spread over eastern and northern Scotland, was 20.2%. This was rather better than in 1979 and only the second time in the last seven years that it has been over the long-term average. The mean size of 243 broods was 2.3.

The regional distribution shown in the table opposite is not greatly different from that in recent years, with numbers in south-east Scotland changing most, and reaching their highest percentage of the total so far. There was an abundance of spilt grain in north and east-central Scotland, and this is reflected in the presence in those two regions of some 80% of the total population.

PINKFEET

The considerable increase shown this year to a new record total was not initially expected, as a sample of 3900 birds aged in Perth and Kinross, and in Grampian, revealed 16.4% young birds, with close agreement between the two areas. Such a breeding success would normally lead to only a slight increase in total numbers. However, an observer in Lancashire has found a much higher percentage of young birds, 23.5% in a sample of 5597. If the two samples are combined the overall percentage of young is 20.6% which is the highest for 8 years, and certainly high enough to give at least some increase. It seems probable though, that the 1979 census may have been an underestimate, bearing in mind the very much worse weather conditions at the time of the census.

Age ratio counts from different parts of the winter range have shown some differences in past years though not by so wide a margin. The finding of a higher proportion of successful breeders in the south of the winter range fits with the pattern shown by some other populations of geese. In Scotland 229 broods gave a mean size of 2.2, while 76 broods in Lancashire had a mean of 2.1.

The regional distribution is shown in the table. East and central Scotland has come well to the fore this year with most other areas declining in proportion. Interestingly there were more birds than for many years on the Solway.

Regional distribution of Greylags and Pinkfeet in November 1978-1980

Figures are percentages of the total populations

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	1978	1979	1980	1978	1979	1980
North Scotland	47.1	40.5	42.2	18.2	9.0	6.9
East Central Scotland	26.8	41.1	37.1	41.9	35.1	49.0
South-east Scotland	6.4	6.6	10.0	31.6	33.5	29.5
South-west Scotland	7.8	6.8	7.3	1.0	0.2	4.5
North England	1.9	5.0	3.4	6.8	20.7	9.7
East England	-	-	-	0.5	1.5	0.4

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